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Secretary Shultz

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No Delay for Democracy

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Following is an address by Secretary Shultz before the National Foreign Policy Conference for Young Political Leaders, Department of State, Washington, D.C., June 13, 1986.

I appreciate the chance to talk to you, and I appreciate the fact that you are here listening to us, and let me assure you that we listen to you. So with that, let me launch into the things that I have to say, and I'm going to talk about Central America—a matter of great concern to us here and, I think, of importance and concern throughout our country.

Throughout its history the United States has been blessed with a society remarkable for its freedoms and its openness. Our liberty has given us a unique approach to the world: outgoing, optimistic, self-confident. As young political leaders, you have a special interest in preserving this legacy.

Our unique geographic position—bordered as we are by vast protective oceans to the east and west and friendly neighbors on the north and south—is essential to our world. We now seek to secure our way of life with forward defenses and far-flung alliances based on the confidence that our immediate frontiers are secure and that our freedoms can flourish behind them.

But we are taking our secure frontiers for granted.

We must remember that our southern flank, the Caribbean, has been—and is—an area of vulnerability. During the Second World War, U-boats took a heavy toll of our shipping in the region. In 1962, the world came close to nuclear holocaust when the Soviet Union attempted to install missiles in Cuba. Today, the Soviets have a combat brigade in Cuba and use the island as a base for conducting intelligence patrols along our eastern coast and in the Caribbean.

The presence of hostile submarine bases, extensive airfields, and Soviet aircraft vastly complicates our defense planning. Cuba's attempts to launch revolutions throughout the hemisphere, and its sending of tens of thousands of its troops into Africa, have made this small communist state a threat to democracy everywhere. So we cannot view with indifference Moscow's attempt—using Cuban, East European, Libyan, and North Korean surrogates, among others—to establish itself in a similar fashion on the American mainland.

The other side of this concern is our great interest for its own sake in the political, social, and economic development of our democratic neighbors to the south—not just because their development is consistent with U.S. values but also because our national security is intimately linked to their security.

Most of Central America is now emerging from a long and dismal period of government by dictatorship. During the last 6 years, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have joined Costa Rica in establishing truly democratic governments. The elected presidents of these four Central American democracies share common ideals based on their dedication to freedom. They each have a mandate from their people to bring about economic and social justice. These leaders are scheduled to serve together through the completion of President Duarte's term in May 1989. U.S. policy explicitly and firmly supports them and their cooperative efforts to create a better life for their people. That support is the cornerstone of our policy for Central America.

One of the first challenges to our goals for Central America is to restore economic vitality to the region. The early 1980s saw a heavy strain on the economies of Central America. Today, there are important signs of hope. They're getting a few good breaks: interest rates have come down, and the price of oil has come down. And the price of coffee, a principal export, has risen in price. There are renewed stirrings of the regional commerce that was an engine for strong growth during the 1960s.

The United States has been able to lay the foundation for regional economic growth through the Caribbean Basin Initiative and President Reagan's response to the recommendations of the National Bipartisan Commission [on Central America]—the so-called Kissinger report. Despite our extreme budget stringencies, we hope to sustain economic assistance to the region at the level of about a billion dollars—an amount nearly four times greater than our military assistance. In other

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words, that's where our priorities are. The goal of long-term, real *per capita* growth in the region now seems within reach.

Nicaragua: Obstacle to Progress in Central America

But there is one major obstacle to progress in Central America. It is the same obstacle which gives us pause as we assess our own national interests in the region. It is Nicaragua, a Marxist-Leninist odd man out, a spoiler of the dream of democracy and of regional cooperation.

Since 1979, when the *comandantes* took power from the Somoza regime, Nicaragua has armed itself to the teeth with Soviet assistance. It has served as the headquarters, communications center, and logistical base for communist guerrillas in El Salvador. And it has supported terrorist plots against its other neighbors.

The Nicaraguan revolution did not have to turn out this way. After the fall of Somoza, the United States and Nicaragua's neighbors quickly extended diplomatic recognition to the broadly based revolutionary government in Managua. We in the United States provided $118 million in economic assistance during the first year and a half after the revolution. I might say that was the highest per capita rate of economic assistance going anywhere at that time. What was the response of the *comandantes?* They drove their partners in the revolution from the government; and they moved to consolidate their power by trying to crush the church, the independent labor unions, and the private business sector. In early 1980—within months of taking power—the Nicaraguan communists concluded their first pacts with Cuba and the Soviet Union. By 1981, Soviet military supplies and thousands of Eastern-bloc advisers—so-called—were moving into the country.

Soviet-bloc military assistance totals over $500 million since 1980. Some 8,000–10,000 foreign communists now play key roles in all aspects of Nicaraguan life. Nicaraguans themselves have fled their country by the hundreds of thousands, and some 20,000 have taken up arms in a desperate struggle to regain their revolution.

A stable solution to the threat of Nicaragua lies in a process of national reconciliation—both within Nicaragua and through a regional peace process with its neighbors. In 1979, Nicaraguan revolutionaries pledged to the Organization of American States their support for political pluralism and regional peace. In September 1983 the Nicaraguan Government joined with all the other Contadora countries in support of 21 objectives designed to bring peace to the region. The political and economic inducements for the *comandantes* to implement such a policy were there from the beginning; but they have spurned every effort to reconcile the real differences with their neighbors and with their own people.

President Duarte, with the support of the Central American democracies, is engaged in an effort toward reconciliation with the opposition to his elected government. Why cannot the *comandantes* do likewise? In Nicaragua, as in El Salvador, those in power should be seeking a reconciliation with all elements of society through a peaceful political process. But once again we see that Marxist-Leninists cannot afford democratization. Their policies of repression and mismanagement at home and conflicts with their neighbors make them poor prospects for success in free elections.

If the inducements we offered Managua in the early 1980s failed to encourage domestic democracy and regional peace, how then is a comprehensive regional settlement to be achieved? We can only conclude that unrelenting pressure is required if the Nicaraguan communists are to make the fundamental changes required for such a settlement.

Such pressure must come from many directions: popular dissatisfaction with the regime's dismal economic performance; growing alienation of the revolution's foreign friends; the consolidation of democracy elsewhere in Central America; and an internal political opposition that refuses to be silenced.

Serious economic dislocations—growing primarily from the communists' mismanagement of the economy and reinforced by the U.S. economic embargo—are bringing about a dramatic reduction in the gross national product of Nicaragua. Food and other staples are vanishing from Nicaragua's marketplace. Even in the worst years of the Somoza tyranny, Nicaraguans did not have to wait in line for rice, beans, or oil.

The people of Nicaragua don't blame the United States for these shortages. They correctly blame their own government for destroying the nation's ability to produce basic foodstuffs—commodities that in years past never had to be imported.

Internationally, Nicaragua's noncommunist supporters are showing increasing concern about the character of the government in Managua. The foreign political support and economic assistance on which Nicaragua increasingly depends are declining.

The people of Nicaragua look elsewhere in their region and see freedom and its benefits continuing in Costa Rica and taking hold in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. They ask themselves, why are we being left behind? Rather than enjoying the freedom they struggled for in 1979, the people of Nicaragua face the pervasive and ever-tightening repression of a communist dictatorship. They now see that their revolution was stolen from them by political opportunists; and they are struggling to regain their fading hopes. They remember that in 1979 the international community, including the United States, supported their struggle for freedom. But who supports them now, in their time of greatest need?

The Nicaraguan Opposition

Despite the efforts of the *comandantes* to suppress their opposition, independent organizations still survive in Nicaragua. The church, labor unions, Indians, and the private sector continue to struggle for rights they are denied. Although the press is censored, critical voices continue to be heard. Political parties carry on their work amidst ever-tightening restrictions on the freedom to organize. And Cardinal Obando y Bravo is cheered by his flock—yet, his words are silenced.

The Nicaraguan communists probably could use their power to crush internal opposition once and for all, but they have not yet taken that final step.

Why? It is because communist repression has created another opposition—the armed resistance of 20,000 Nicaraguans. And as long as the civil war continues, the Nicaraguan communists need to keep some internal opposition alive—just barely alive—as a demonstration to the world that Nicaragua is not a totally closed society. Were it not for the freedom fighters, the brave Nicaraguans who voice internal dissent would serve no purpose for the *comandantes.*

And what of these 20,000 freedom fighters? Who are they? The freedom fighters in Nicaragua today are young people who were barely teenagers when Somoza was overthrown. The majority of the military leaders either had no prior military service before entering the resistance or were drafted to serve

with the Nicaraguan communists and then left them. Their ranks have swelled during the past 2 years, even while the United States has been prohibited from providing them with military assistance.

The top leadership of the movement through which we channel all U.S. assistance to the freedom fighters is comprised of three civilians—each of whom distinguished himself in the resistance to Somoza. One by one, they left the Nicaragua of the communists to resume their struggle for democratic government.

The numbers of their troops—despite their growth over the last 2 years—are no match for the Soviet-armed and -equipped Army of Nicaragua. This army of some 60,000—with an additional 60,000 reservists who engage in active combat—is far larger than any other military force in Central America; but it is not able to contain the freedom fighters on its own. The Soviets supply the Nicaraguan communists with advanced attack helicopters. They ship military supplies directly to Nicaraguan ports. Cubans fly the attack helicopters. East Germans train the internal security forces. And we have confirmed that a Soviet AN-30 intelligence aircraft has been flying reconnaissance in Nicaragua since May of this year.

The freedom fighters need our help to confront the Nicaraguan communist troops equipped with these Soviet arms, training, and advice. We have seen in El Salvador that, with proper leadership, training, and American equipment, democratic forces can prevail. Therefore, the Administration has been urging authorization of $70 million in military aid and $30 million in humanitarian aid to these fighters for democracy.

Gradually, I believe, Congress and the American people are coming to realize that we face a grave threat in Central America—a threat to our strategic interests and to the cause of democracy.

Supporting Democracy in Nicaragua

We all know the divisions in our domestic debate on the seriousness of this threat. But there is one overriding goal about which I firmly believe there is no division in the Congress or in the minds of the American people. That is the goal of supporting democracy—is anybody here against that?—in Nicaragua and in all of Central America. I don't believe there is a single Member of Congress who wants to see the communists consolidate their tyranny over the people of Nicaragua—does anybody here want that? Nor is there a single Member of Congress who wants to turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the Nicaraguan church, to the appeals of Nicaragua's democratic political opposition, to the *campesinos*—or even to the fighters of the democratic resistance.

Their struggle is, after all, our struggle. What the Nicaraguans want is only what we in the United States have always cherished: freedom—the freedom to vote, to think, to speak out, to worship as one chooses, without the threat of intimidation, or torture, or death. That is what the people of Nicaragua fought for in their revolution of 1979, and that is what they are fighting for today. I am confident that no one in this country will support a policy which, wittingly or unwittingly, crushes the hopes of an entire nation for freedom and democracy.

Congress has shown its resolve to support democracy in the rest of Central America. It is supporting the reestablishment of democracy in the Philippines. It is supporting distant struggles against communist tyrannies in Afghanistan and Cambodia. I believe that, sooner or later, Congress will commit itself with equal determination to support the struggle for democracy on our own mainland. The crucial question is when that support will come—sooner or later.

As the end of June approaches, we are still awaiting a definitive answer from the Congress on support for our policy toward Nicaragua. Our proposal to aid the Nicaraguan freedom fighters was passed by the Senate over 2 months ago. The problem is in the House of Representatives, where delay continues. This delay makes it difficult to plan and conduct foreign policy in a region where events bear directly on our vital national security interests. It sends confusing signals to the Central American democracies and other Latin and Caribbean states.

How long can we ask the Nicaraguan freedom fighters to struggle against their oppressors without the prospect of sustained and real support: weapons, boots and uniforms, food, medical supplies? Shall *we* wait another month, or two months, or three to give them the help they need in their struggle for freedom?

I say we cannot afford to wait, that history will judge us severely if we delay any longer.

Our indecision only plays into the hands of the communists. It gives them time to advance their suppression of the church, the free trade unions, the press, and political parties; time to continue killing freedom fighters; and time to continue their campaign against the Miskito Indians.

Our delay has given the communists every reason to continue to spurn a political settlement. Since January, six of Nicaragua's opposition parties have proposed a national dialogue of reconciliation. The freedom fighters have sought this same dialogue; and they offer a cease-fire if it takes place. But there are no takers on the communist side.

Let us not delude ourselves that the communists need another 90 days to reconsider their policies. Delay is what the Nicaraguan communists need to win an outright, permanent victory.

Just a few years ago, Central America received scant attention in the American press. In fact, one of my predecessors told me, somewhat condescendingly, "You know, when I was Secretary of State, I don't think I spent 3 minutes on Central America." I just said, "You just defined the problem." We have to pay attention to our neighborhood. That's where it starts. There are lots of problems around the world, and as a world power, we're engaged in them. But we better pay attention to our neighbors and our neighborhood.

Now, however, reports of conflict and faltering peace processes frequently dominate the news. Yet, there is still hope that stories from the region will tell of a promising future. But the hour is late. If the resistance collapses for lack of our support, if the Sandinistas complete their consolidation of power, then the rest of Central America must be forever vigilant against the nearby threat of a communist Nicaragua. Economic resources will be diverted to defense, and we will incur the enormous costs of containing the threat.

Now is the time to get on with the task of rebuilding all of Central America, including Nicaragua. The United States is committed to assisting in that effort. But first, we need to make a commitment to the democratic resistance in Nicaragua that will lead the communists and their sponsors to reconsider their policies. They need to weigh the many costs of continuing conflict. They must be made to understand that now is the time to conclude a meaningful regional peace process.

The accord which emerges from this process must be comprehensive and verifiable, and all of its provisions must be implemented simultaneously. Essential to this process is genuine national reconciliation with those fighting for freedom. Nicaragua's neighbors are

committed to such an agreement. We would support it. All that is needed is the realization of the *comandantes* that they have no alternative. Our assistance to the freedom fighters is essential to that realization.

Clear Choices

The choices for us are clear. Timely action on our part will give Central America the opportunity to enter into a period of peace, democracy, and economic progress led by democratically elected leaders cooperating with one another. Inaction will see democracy imperiled. It will bring continuing conflict, the diversion of scarce resources into arms buildups, bloodshed, and repression. It will bring a heightened communist threat to American security.

What do we seek from all the parties who have a stake in the Nicaraguan conflict?

From the communist regime, we seek a commitment to democracy and national reconciliation. They must enter into a dialogue as proposed by the six political opposition parties inside Nicaragua and the United Nicaraguan Opposition, leading to the opposition's full participation in the political life of the nation. And they must consent to a binding agreement with Nicaragua's neighbors to end interference in their affairs, reduce regional arms levels, and eliminate outside military involvement.

From the Contadora group, we seek a serious effort to address the key outstanding issues in the peace process through specific procedures for ensuring democracy, and verifiable military arms reductions. Any such agreement which obscures and confuses those essential points of contention or postpones their resolution is no agreement at all.

From the U.S. Congress, we seek a positive commitment to continue to fund the action plan of the National Bipartisan Commission—the Kissinger commission—at levels sufficient to further peace, democracy, and development in Central America and to serve as a positive incentive for change in Nicaragua. And we urge immediate approval of the funding for the freedom fighters as a critical element for bringing Nicaragua into a meaningful peace process.

For our part, the Administration will not diminish its commitment to support democracy, development, defense, and dialogue in Central America. All four remain pillars of our policy. Nicaragua has excluded itself from our assistance to the region by the choices it has made.

At the same time, we will take whatever actions are necessary to protect our national security interests. We will not relent from our efforts to support the freedom fighters so long as the government in Nicaragua oppresses its citizens, so long as it serves as a base in our hemisphere for the Soviets and their surrogates, and so long as it subverts its neighbors.

The choice is now up to Nicaragua. We count on the Congress to help the Nicaraguan communists make the right decision. ■

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